

Message Text

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AMEMBASSY JIDDA PRIORITY

AMEMBASSY MUSCAT PRIORITY

AMEMBASSY NAIROBI PRIORITY

AMEMBASSY TEHRAN PRIORITY

AMEMBASSY VICTORIA PRIORITY

AMEMBASSY PORT LOUIS PRIORITY

C O N F I D E N T I A L STATE 031433

EXDIS

FOLLOWING TEL SENT ACTION SECSTATE FROM MANAMA JAN 29:

QUOTE C O N F I D E N T I A L MANAMA 0244

EXDIS

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS : PFOR, BA

SUBJECT : MIDDLE EAST FORCE: "NEW FORMULA" TALKS

1. SUMMARY. FOREIGN MINISTER WELCOMED OPENING OF INFORMAL TALKS WITH ME ABOUT POSSIBLE NEW FORMULA FOR MIDEASTFOR. HE UNDERSTOOD THAT WHILE AT THIS STAGE OUR DISCUSSIONS ARE CONFIDENTIAL

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EXPLORATORY, INTENTION IS TO MOVE SOON TO POINT AT WHICH BOTH GOVERNMENTS CAN DECIDE IF NEW FORMULA POSSIBLE, OR NOT. ON SPECIFICS, FONMIN SAID THAT IN ADDITION TO NECESSITY OF SHARING BURDEN REGIONALLY, KEY ELEMENT OF MIDEASTFOR WHICH MUST BE CHANGED IS FACT AND IMAGE OF HAVING ADMIRAL AND FLAGSHIP BASED IN BAHRAIN. HE UNDERTOOK TO CONSIDER OTHER ELEMENTS OF MIDEASTFOR (COMMO, AIRCRAFT, LOGISTICS, TIME-IN-PORT) IN TERMS WHICH GOB WOULD FIND ACCEPTABLE. END SUMMARY.

2. FOREIGN MINISTER RESPONDED FAVORABLY JAN. 26 TO MY FIRST INFORMAL DISCUSSION WITH HIM ABOUT WHAT DETAILS OF ANY NEW MIDEASTFOR FORMULA MIGHT BE. HE CLEARLY WAS PLEASED THAT USG "FINALLY" WILLING TO DISCUSS NAVY PRESENCE HERE IN TERMS NEW CONCEPTS AND SAID HE WAS PREPARED BEGIN INFORMAL TALKS ON DETAILS OF POSSIBLE FUTURE NAVY PRESENCE IN BAHRAIN. HE WAS OF COURSE CURIOUS ABOUT MY CONSULTATION IN WASHINGTON, AND PARTICULARLY ABOUT WHETHER NEW US ADMINISTRATION HAD APPROVED SEARCH FOR NEW FORMULA. I EXPLAINED THAT WHILE NEW ADMINISTRATION HAD NOT YET HAD CHANCE TO MAKE ITS OWN JUDGMENTS ON MIDEASTFOR ISSUE, SENIOR MEMBERS OF NEW TEAM IN DEPT HAD DECIDED THAT KEY TO THESE JUDGMENTS WILL BE FIRM IDEA OF WHETHER OR NOT NEW FORMULA ACCEPTABLE TO BOTH SIDES IS POSSIBLE. THEREFORE, SINCE TIME IS SHORT, IT HAD BEEN AGREED THAT I WOULD BEGIN NOW TO EXPLORE WITH HIM IN DETAIL ELEMENTS OF POSSIBLE NEW APPROACH, SUBJECT OF COURSE TO EVENTUAL CONSIDERATION BY BOTH GOVERNMENTS. HE AGREED THAT WE COULD DISCUSS ISSUE ON THIS BASIS.

3. FOREIGN MINISTER ASKED WHAT KIND OF TIME DID WE HAVE TO DISCUSS ISSUE, IN VIEW BOTH OF WHEN NEW ADMINISTRATION WOULD FOCUS ON QUESTION DEFINITELY AND OF TIME PRESSURES ON NAVY. I SAID THAT, WORKING BACKWARD FROM JUNE 30 DEADLINE AND FORWARD TO POINT WHEN NEW ADMINISTRATION REALISTICALLY MIGHT BE READY TO MAKE DEFINITE JUDGMENT, WE OUGHT TO CONFIDENTIAL

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KNOW BY ABOUT MID-MARCH WHETHER NEW FORMULA CAN BE FOUND. FONMIN SAID THIS SOUNDED REASONABLE TO HIM AND HE WOULD KEEP IT IN MIND AS BASIS FOR HIS OWN DELIBERATIONS WITHIN GOB.

4. TURNING TO SPECIFICS, FONMIN SAID HE HOPED USG HAD ACCEPTED AS FOUNDATION OF ANY NEW FORMULA CONCEPT OF SHARING BURDEN REGIONALLY. I REPLIED THAT WE HAD INDEED ACCEPTED THIS CONCEPT, THOUGH RATHER THAN CHARACTERIZE IT AS BURDEN SHARING WE SAW IT IN TERMS OF FINDING NEW AND DIFFERENT WAY TO PERFORM MIDEASTFOR MISSIONS. EXPLAINED THAT WHILE I WAS NOT THEN IN POSITION TO DESCRIBE WAYS AND MEANS IN DETAIL, WE WERE NOT, FOR EXAMPLE, CONTEMPLATING SETTING UP MINI-BASES ELSEWHERE TO COMPENSATE FOR FACILITIES WE MIGHT NO LONGER HAVE IN BAHRAIN. RATHER, WE WERE AT THIS STAGE CONSIDERING WHOLE SERIES OF ADJUSTMENTS IN MIDEASTFOR OPERATIONS, NO ONE OF THEM VERY MAJOR, WHICH, TAKEN TOGETHER, WOULD PERMIT ITS MISSION TO BE ACCOMPLISHED WITHOUT SOME OF FACILITIES NAVY NOW ENJOYS HERE.

5. I THEN ABSTRACTED FOR FONMIN FUNCTIONAL ELEMENTS OF MIDEASTFOR -- TIME-IN-PORT, BERTHING, COMMO, LOGISTICS, FLAG PRESENCE, AIRCRAFT -- AND ASKED HIM TO IDENTIFY ONE OR TWO WHICH IN HIS VIEW PROJECTED THE IMAGE OF A FOREIGN BASE

WHICH HE HAS MADE CLEAR MUST BE REMOVED. HE REPLIED AT ONCE THAT BAHRAIN SHOULD NO LONGER BE HOMEPORTED OF FLAGSHIP AND ADMIRAL. FONMIN CONTINUED THAT BAHRAIN MUST BE ABLE TO SAY IN JUNE THAT MIDEASTFOR HAS BEEN WITHDRAWN, THAT USG-GOB AGREEMENT COVERING MIDEASTFOR HAS ENDED. WHAT WE WERE TALKING ABOUT NOW, HE WENT ON, IS A NEW POST-MIDEASTFOR ARRANGEMENT FOR LIMITED USN USE OF BAHRAIN'S PORT FACILITIES. IF BAHRAIN CAN SAY CONVINCINGLY THAT THERE IS NO LONGER US BASE IN BAHRAIN, THEN NUMBER OF DAYS SHIPS VISIT HERE OR AMOUNT OF SUPPLIES THEY LOAD HERE IS BAHRAIN'S BUSINESS FOR WHICH IT NEED NOT APOLOGIZE. I REPLIED THAT I FELT THAT DE-HOMEPORTING OF FLAGSHIP WITH ADMIRAL AND CONFIDENTIAL

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HIS STAFF WOULD BE ACCEPTABLE TO USG IF OTHER ELEMENTS COULD BE WORKED OUT.

6. CONCERNING COMMUNICATIONS FACILITIES, FONMIN SAID HE WAS HESITANT TO DISCUSS IT NOW BECAUSE OF STORIES GAINING CREDENCE HERE THAT MIDEASTFOR'S "SECRET" COMMUNICATION CAPABILITIES WERE USED TO SUPPORT ISRAEL'S RAID ON ENTEBBE AIRPORT. FONMIN HAD SEEN STORIES IN US PRESS ABOUT MIDEASTFOR SHIP BEING DEPLOYED IN SUPPORT OF KENYA AFTER RAID AND SAID THAT THESE STORIES HAD BEEN BLOWN UP IN REGION TO POINT WHERE SOME PEOPLE BELIEVE MIDEASTFOR PLAYED ACTIVE ROLE IN SUPPORT OF ISRAELI ACTION ITSELF. FONMIN SAID HE DID NOT BELIEVE SUCH STORIES BUT CURRENCY THEY ARE GIVEN, AND QUESTIONS THEY RAISE, ARE PART OF BURDEN OF HAVING MIDEASTFOR HERE.

7. FONMIN SAID HE WOULD CONSIDER FUTURE LOGISTICS USE OF BAHRAIN BY NAVY, AS WELL AS CONTINUING TO HAVE MIDEASTFOR AIRCRAFT HERE. CONCERNING TIME-IN-PORT, FONMIN SAID HE COULD FORESEE NO PROBLEM WITH THE 12-16 WEEKS OF NON-CONSECUTIVE PRESENCE I HAD MENTIONED. I ALSO EXPANDED ON LOGISTICS USE OF BAHRAIN, POINTING OUT THAT BAHRAIN OFFERED FACILITIES NOT READILY FOUND ELSEWHERE AND THAT BAHRAIN'S ROLE AS SERVICE CENTER FOR REGION WOULD ALONE JUSTIFY NAVY'S SEEKING SOMEWHAT LONGER STAYS HERE THAN ELSEWHERE, AS WELL AS SOME LOGISTICS CAPABILITY OF ITS OWN ON SHORE.

8. FONMIN ASKED FOR HOW LONG WOULD USG WANT ANY NEW ARRANGEMENT TO RUN. I REPLIED THAT IT WOULD BE DIFFICULT TO SAY NOW, SINCE NEW ADMINISTRATION MUST FORMULATE ITS OWN VIEWS ON US PRESENCE ABROAD, OF WHICH MIDEASTFOR A SMALL PART, BUT THAT, PERSONALLY, I FELT ANYTHING LESS THAN TWO OR THREE YEARS WOULD NOT BE WORTH THE EFFORT. HE AGREED AND THEN, SURPRISINGLY, SUGGESTED THAT AFTER TWO OR THREE YEARS OF A NEW ARRANGEMENT BOTH SIDES MIGHT WISH TO CONSIDER INCREASING NAVY PRESENCE IN REGION AS WELL AS CONFIDENTIAL

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IN BAHRAIN. FONMIN CONTINUED THAT IF ARAB-ISRAEL DISPUTE SETTLED AND THAT IF USSR WOULD INDEED RUN LOW ON OIL BY 1981, AS HE HAD READ, THEN AREA STATES COULD AND WOULD SEEK US UMBRELLA AS DETERRENT TO SOVIET PRESSURES IN DIRECTION OF ARAB OIL.

9. COMMENT: FOREIGN MINISTER SEEMED GENUINELY INTERESTED IN DISCUSSING THE DETAILS OF SOME NAVY USE OF BAHRAIN IN THE FUTURE. IT REMAINS TO BE SEEN OF COURSE WHETHER HIS INTEREST ON THIS OCCASION WAS DUE TO A SINCERE WISH TO FIND A NEW APPROACH OR SIMPLY REFLECTED HIS OBVIOUS PLEASURE AT HAVING HAD HIS WAY ABOUT A NEW FORMULA AS THE BASIS FOR TALKS TO BE CONDUCTED THROUGH HIM. HE DID NOT MENTION THE DEFENSE SURVEY REPORT (NOR DID I OF COURSE) AND FROM THE ARMS SALES POINT OF VIEW AT LEAST WE PROBABLY CAN GO FURTHER WITH THE FONMIN THAN WITH THE PRIME MINISTER IN EXPLORING A NEW FORMULA FOR THE NAVY BEFORE GETTING INTO THE QUIDS AND QUOS.

10. DEPT REPEAT TO APPROPRIATE DOD AND MILITARY ADDRESSES. CLUVERIIUS UNQUOTE VANCE

CONFIDENTIAL

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